

Zuheir Mohsen

Zuheir Mohsen (Arabic: زهير محسن; 1936 – 25 July 1979) was a Palestinian leader of the pro-Syria as-Sa'iqa faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) between 1971 and 1979. Previously active as a refugee in the Jordanian wing of the Ba'ath Party, he was chosen for this position after defense minister Hafez al-Assad's 1969–70 takeover in Syria, which he had supported against the previously dominant government of Salah Jadid. Mohsen was also a member of the National Command of the Ba'ath Party.^[1]

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Zuheir Mohsen	
Native name	زهير محسن
Born	1936 Tulkarm, Mandatory Palestine
Died	25 July 1979 Cannes, France
Cause of death	Assassinated
Nationality	 Palestinian
Occupation	Leader of the pro-Syria as-Sa'iqa faction of the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)
Political party	Ba'ath party

Early life

Mohsen was born in Tulkarm, Mandatory Palestine, now in the northern West Bank, where his father was the mukhtar (head of the town).^[2] He became involved in political activity at a young age, joining the Ba'ath party at the age of 17.^[3] Mohsen trained as a teacher but lost his job in 1957 after being arrested for "subversive activity". He subsequently spent time in Qatar, from where he was eventually deported as a result of his political activity, before making his way to Damascus where he helped form as-Sa'iqa.^[3]

Mohsen rose to the position of heading as-Sa'iqa thanks to his close links to Assad, who after taking power in Syria purged the movement of its leftist elements (bringing it ideologically closer to Fatah) and appointed Mohsen as its General Secretary.^[4]

Political views

Mohsen essentially followed the line of as-Sa'iqa's Syrian Ba'athist ideology, which interpreted the Palestinian question through a perspective of pan-Arab nationalism. In some respects this contravened the PLO charter, which affirmed the existence of a Palestinian people with national rights. Historically, some hostility existed between the main Fatah faction of the PLO under Yasser Arafat and the Ba'ath party of Hafez al-Assad on this issue.

Mohsen himself stated that there were "no differences between Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians, and Lebanese", though Palestinian identity would be emphasised for political reasons. In a March 1977 interview with the Dutch newspaper Trouw he stated that "between Jordanians, Palestinians, Syrians and Lebanese there are no differences. We

are all part of one people, the Arab nation [...] Just for political reasons we carefully underwrite our Palestinian identity. Because it is of national interest for the Arabs to advocate the existence of Palestinians to balance Zionism. Yes, the existence of a separate Palestinian identity exists only for tactical reasons".^[5]

The journalist Robert Fisk was to claim that al-Saiqa, under Mohsen, was to employ its energies "almost exclusively against their brother Palestinians",^[6] stating that in June 1976 he saw "the PLO in open combat within West Beirut against al-Saiqa, who had attacked Arafat's forces on orders from Damascus."^[7]

Assassination

Mohsen was killed by gunshots to his head as he left a casino in Cannes on 27 July 1979 and walked towards the apartment. Although the attack was blamed by various sources on Mossad, Palestinians and Egypt, the gunmen were never identified.^[8]

Notes

1. Brecher, Michael. *Studies in Crisis Behavior* (<https://books.google.com/books?id=IlfqktFeW2IC>). New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1979. p. 257
2. Rayyis and Nahas, *Guerrillas for Palestine*, Taylor & Francis, p.145
3. Rayyis and Nahas, p.144
4. Hiro, D. *Inside the Middle East*, Routledge, 1982, p.153
5. James Dorsey, *Wij zijn alleen Palestijn om politieke reden*, *Trouw*, 31 March 1977
6. Fisk, R. *Pity the Nation*, OUP, 2001, p.75
7. Fisk, pp.80-81
8. West, Nigel (15 August 2017). *Encyclopedia of Political Assassinations* (https://books.google.com.my/books?id=SZMtDwAAQBAJ&pg=PA168&lpg=PA168&dq=zuheir+mohsen+encyclopedia+of+political+assassinations&source=bl&ots=Ev1zzYc-fY&sig=yXYGLA6BFphrXqi28FlyP0M2pX4&hl=en&sa=X&redir_esc=y#v=onepage&q&f=false). Rowman & Littlefield. p. 168. ISBN 978-1-538-10239-8.

References

1. [^] Thomas L. Friedman, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1998, 2nd ed.), p. 118

External links

- 1973 interview with Mohsen (including photograph) (<http://www.domingodelpino.com/index.php?id=1103>)

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